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The Day I Was Older

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The Day I Was Older · *Donald Hall*

1. *The Clock*

The clock on the parlor wall, stout as a mariner's clock,
disperses the day with immaculate ticking.
All night it tolls the half-hour, and the hour's number,
to sail over fathoms of sleep with resolute measure,
approaching the poles and crossing the equator
nightly. Warm in the dark next to your breathing,
below the thousand favored stars, I feel
horns of gray water heave
underneath us, and the ship's pistons
pound as the voyage continues over the limited sea.

2. *The News*

After tending the fire, making coffee, and pouring milk
for two cats, I sit with the *Boston Globe*
in a blue chair. Each morning I read obituaries
for the mean age; today I find MANUFACTURER CAMBRIDGE 53,
EX-CONGRESSMAN SAUGUS 80—and I read
that Emily Farr is dead, after a long illness
in Oregon. Once in an old house we talked for an hour
while a coalfire brightened in November twilight
and wavered our shadows high on the wall,
until our eyes fixed on each other. Thirty years ago.

3. *The Pond*

We lie by the pond on a late August afternoon
as a breeze from low hills in the west stiffens water
and agitates birch leaves yellowing above us.
You set down your book
and lift your eyes to white trunks tilting from shore.
A mink scuds through ferns; an acorn tumbles.
Soon we will rise and return to our daily business.
You do not know that I am watching, taking pleasure
in your breasts that rise and fall as you breathe.
Then I see mourners gathered over the open grave.

4. *The Day*

For twenty years I watched as the day approached.
Last night at suppertime I outlived my father, surviving
the year, month, day, and hour
when he lay back on a hospital bed in the guestroom,
among cylinders of oxygen, lips open, nostrils fixed
unquivering, pale blue. Now I have risen
more mornings to frost whitening the grass, read the paper
with coffee more times, and stood more times,
my hand on a doorknob without opening the door.
I remember dark hair, and a face almost unwrinkled.

. . .

5. *The Glass*

On Sunday drives I watched from the Studebaker's backseat
as her earrings swayed. Then I walked uphill beside
an old man carrying buckets, among wavering ferns,
under birches on an August day. From mid-morning's tower,
I looked at wheat and river cities. In the crib
my daughter sighed opening her eyes; I kissed the cheek
of my father dying; I learned of a death in Oregon.

You who read these words, and I who write them (I pace
up and down, in a high room long ago)—let us raise glasses
and touch them, as we drink this wine together.